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Request for Participation #2

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Environmental Impact Statement for a Program of Vegetation Management

A *New Program* for managing competing and unwanted vegetation is being developed by the Pacific Northwest Region (Oregon and Washington) of the USDA Forest Service. This **Request for Participation** is the **second** in a series of requests for your help in the development of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for our new program. It marks the establishment of **Issues** that will drive the entire planning process. The enclosed sheet details information on these issues, on decisions that will result from the EIS process and on alternative themes. At this point we are just sharing information rather than requesting a formal response...but if you have comments, we'd like to hear from you.

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Pacific Northwest Region
Vegetation Management
Environmental Impact Statement

The Process

1. PLANNING & ORGANIZING

- Process Management Meeting 5/86
- Recommendations
- Decision
- Notice of Intent 6/86
- Scoping
- Management Objectives for Environmental Analysis 7/86

2. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

- Interdisciplinary Team Meeting #1 Scoping 8/86
- Tight Outline of E.I.S. Issues Alternatives Data Needs 9/86
- Public Participation Internal Review 10/86
- Interdisciplinary Team Meeting #2 Environmental Analysis 10/86
- Rough Draft of E.I.S. and Outline of Record of Decision 1/87
- Internal Review, Public Participation
- Interdisciplinary Team Meeting #3 Documentation
- Public Release of Draft E.I.S. 3/87

3. DECISION MAKING

- Public Comment Period Internal Review 3/87
- Analysis of Comments
- Interdisciplinary Team Meeting #4 Response to Comments 6/87
- Internal Review Final E.I.S. Record of Decision
- Decision by Responsible Official 8/87
- Public Release of Final E.I.S and Record of Decision (or New Draft E.I.S) (or Supplement) 8/87
- Start of Vegetation Management Activities Spring '88

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Pacific Northwest Region
P.O. Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208
Attn: Vegetation Management Team

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RESULTS OF YOUR PARTICIPATION:

Issues, Decisions, Alternatives

The Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team for short), responsible for developing the Vegetation Management EIS met for the first time the end of August.

All the responses and workshop proceedings received from our initial public involvement efforts were read, discussed and analyzed. We reviewed and discussed management objectives guiding the environmental analysis. Using these two tools:

- issues were identified
- the range of decisions to be made in the EIS determined; and
- alternative themes proposed.

In addition, we drafted an outline of the EIS, projected a timeline and took a quick look at analysis needs.

Following is information on issues, alternatives and the decisions the EIS will make. Also included is a list of the ID Team members and when you can expect to hear from us again. If you have comments, please feel free to contact us:

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Pacific Northwest Region
P.O. Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208
Attn: Vegetation Management Team

ISSUES

Information gathered during the five month public involvement process (and it's not over yet) identified many areas of public concern. After reading and analyzing your comments, the ID Team integrated the comments into seven broad issues. These issues will be thoroughly addressed and analyzed in the EIS. If new issues arise, they will be incorporated during the EIS process.

1. Public Health

Health issues related to management of vegetation have been a major focus during the past decade and continue to be of concern to many. Much attention centers on the safety of herbicides used in vegetation control. We received many comments on the need to evaluate human health impacts. The public asked not only for quantitative analysis but qualitative analysis, also. Principal elements of evaluation include known, unknown and perceived health risks. The scope of risks to be evaluated include all forms of vegetation management, safety and health risks and risks for populations.

2. Public Participation

Public participation in vegetation management is an especially important and sensitive issue because of past conflicts. The public participation process itself is the issue. Members of the public asked us for: 1) participation throughout development of this EIS, 2) ongoing participation and information sharing after the decision has been made, 3) participation in site specific, project level planning; and a 4) readable, clear and understandable analyses and documents.

3. Social and Economic Effects

Vegetation management activities have direct effects on employment and the quality of community life. National Forest activities directly support jobs in many sectors and indirectly in others. Many people expressed concerns about the economic effects of the alternatives. Others raised issues of the effects methods of managing vegetation have on social cohesion and the well-being of communities.

4. Cost-Benefit Analysis

The National Forests offer a wide range of goods and services. Some outputs are sold or leased, others are free. A great many people expressed concern that their money and their resources (in the form of the national forests) be wisely managed and put to the highest and most beneficial use.

5. Environmental Effects

There is concern both within and outside the Forest Service about the physical and biological effects on the environment when applying vegetation management techniques. Almost everyone who responded expressed concern and interest in the quality of the human environment. Complex physical and biological linkages, sensitivity of ecosystems, and direct, indirect, and long-term effects are all relationships that need to be addressed.

6. Effectiveness of Techniques

This issue addresses current vegetative management techniques and products. It looks at the need for fitting techniques to appropriate site conditions. Many people made comments on the need to look at environmental variables, current technology, effectiveness, desirability and monitoring, all as part of evaluating the effectiveness of techniques.

7. Interagency Coordination

Agencies at all levels of government have a shared interest in resource management through vegetation manipulation. Many may be directly affected by decisions made in the EIS, others indirectly. Many agencies reminded us of cooperative agreements, administrative or cost impacts, and shared legal responsibilities or liabilities. These are just a few of the points that show the importance of close interagency coordination.

SCOPE OF EIS DECISIONS

The new EIS will encompass the Region's entire program for managing competing and unwanted vegetation. This includes treatment of slash, but excludes treatments in nurseries, which will be considered in a separate EIS. A full range of vegetation management methods will be considered for all applicable programs.

Decisions will be made for the following activities:

plantation site preparation
tree genetics activities
recreation facilities maintenance
noxious weed control
fire management activities
rights-of-way maintenance
conifer release
research
range improvement
wildlife habitat improvement
facilities maintenance

Decisions include:

1. What is the permissible range of tools for vegetation management in each of the above programs? Decisions such as matching a specific tool to a specific site condition will not be made.
2. To what extent do we involve the public? Participation could range from no notification to posting notices to thorough involvement in the decision-making process.
3. What are the appropriate standards and guidelines and mitigation measures? Considerations such as the type of site, use, location and hazard will influence the range of techniques available.
4. Who will monitor activities? Will it occur at the Regional, Forest or project level?
5. How can we best provide for public health and safety?

ALTERNATIVE THEMES

The ID Team's discussions and analysis led to the following seven alternative themes. We believe this range of alternatives is responsive to the issues raised by the public. We expect some changes in the alternatives during continuing analysis and public involvement.

Alternative A – This alternative represents the package of vegetative management techniques **available and currently used** in the Region 6 National Forests. Fiscal year **1986** will serve as the reference year to represent the techniques available, the amount they are used, and the observed effects.

Alternative B – This alternative is the package of vegetative management techniques **available and used** in Region 6 National Forests **at the time of the U.S. District Court injunction in 1984.** Fiscal year 1983 will serve as the reference year in this alternative.

Alternative C – In Alternative C, vegetative management will be at the **custodial level.** Activities would be limited to only those **necessary for public health and safety.** For example, roads would be cleared for visibility and hazard trees removed in campgrounds. **No chemical use will be allowed.** In general, no vegetative management, except for timber harvest, will be evident.

Alternative D – The general theme of this alternative is to use **natural processes as a reference** for selecting vegetative management techniques. **Simple, low energy techniques** that require a minimum commitment of resources to accomplish program objectives would be used. **Adverse effects on the environment would be minimized.** Approaches that maintain diversity of plant and animal species and their ecological roles would be emphasized.

Alternative E – Opportunities for **reducing adverse health effects or injuries will be emphasized** in all programs. **All tools** (biological, thermal, manual, chemical, and mechanical) **are available.** However, **chemical use and broadcast burning** will tend to be **reduced.** Coordination with public health agencies will be increased in order to implement health effects monitoring.

Alternative F – The direction of this alternative is to **maximize present net value** (providing the greatest economic benefit over the long run) in managing vegetation on the National Forest. It will generally be achieved by emphasizing techniques and programs which are most **economically efficient,** intensifying management for **high productivity** and allowing the manager **full use of all methods.**

Alternative G – This alternative is the package of vegetative management activities which will **most favorably affect the economies of communities** near the National Forests. Activities will feature intensive chemical, mechanical and thermal vegetation management activities **which support high levels of commodity production and payments to counties.** It will **also feature labor intensive, manual and biological** vegetation management techniques which directly employ workers.

ID TEAM

The ID Team selected for developing the EIS brings together a wide variety of professionals specializing in all aspects of natural resource management. They are:

Thomas Atzet, Ecologist
Katherine C. Bowman, Writer Editor
Kimberly Brandel, Forester/Fuels Management
Richard Brown, Wildlife Biologist
Jan M. Engert, Forester/Public Information
Nicholas Heyer, Industrial Hygienist
Arnold G. Holden, Sociologist
Gary L. Larsen, Hydrologist/Manager/Administrator
(Project Leader, Vegetation Management Program)
JoAnn Metzler, Hydrologist
Dale J. Pekar, Economist
Mike Schafer, Silviculturist/Pesticide Use Specialist
Terry Solberg, Forester/Administrator
(I.D. Team Leader)
Jack Van Lear, Engineer/Roads Specialist

We will request your participation again in the near future as the development of the analysis process and alternatives proceeds.